

Parks and Recreation

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Blackwater Conservation Area

Introduction: Parks and Recreation

Parks not only provide accessible open spaces and recreational opportunities for residents, but are a source of intrinsic environmental, aesthetic, and social benefits to our cities – from economic development, measurable health benefits from providing direct contact with nature, opportunities for physical activity and social interaction, important settings for arts and cultural programs, play spaces that provide hands-on learning environments to match the varied learning styles of children, and increased social capital of a community. Parks provide green infrastructure – the interconnected system of green spaces that conserves natural systems, sustains clean air and water, and helps to manage storm water. Green infrastructure is a community’s natural life support system. Just as growing communities need to upgrade and expand access through their built infrastructure of roads, trails, bike paths, sewers, and utilities, they also need to upgrade and maintain their infrastructure of green spaces, greenways, parks and conservation areas.



Hooper Road Park

Core Values and Aspirations of the Vision

A diverse group of residents and stakeholders representing all parts of East Baton Rouge Parish provided input through workshops, open houses, interviews, focus groups and survey discussions. Respondents consistently cited the following core values and aspirations they believed should be the foundation for building a vision for East Baton Rouge Parish.

Core values that relate to parks and recreation:

Equity: All residents have access to a good education, public services, housing and job opportunities.

Safety: People feel safe where they live, work and play.

Strong Neighborhoods and Communities: Neighborhoods in all areas of the City are desirable places to live and have a range of housing types and nearby amenities to serve the City-Parish's residents.

Healthy Environment: Natural resources are protected and conserved to provide active and passive recreational opportunities for current and future residents.

Sustainability: The future reflects the creativity and resiliency of East Baton Rouge Parish's young residents and offers a sustainable place for youth to thrive – with a focus on building a future based on fiscal, physical, environmental, economic and equitable sustainability.



Comite River Park



Downtown Greenway

Part I:

A Growing Parks System

East Baton Rouge Parish has an extensive but largely underused network of existing green spaces. Neighborhood parks, community parks, downtown parks and plazas, parks for organized sports, festivals and concerts are all part of the parks network in East Baton Rouge Parish. The parks and recreation vision for FUTUREBR includes improving existing parks, making strategic investments and increasing maintenance expenditures to enhance the quality of existing parks.

FUTUREBR seeks to promote BREC (Recreation and Park Commission for the Parish of East Baton Rouge) priority actions and recommendations and establish additional programs for land and natural resource conservation and management. In addition, policies that encourage walking, biking, and the alternative transportation networks will create more livable and healthy communities. A high quality system of parks and recreation resources provides a multitude of community benefits: protecting our environment, preserving wildlife habitat, strengthening local economies, attracting new businesses, contributing to the local tax base, increasing property values, and promoting healthy lifestyles.

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Part 1: A Growing Parks System

BREC is well known for providing community and local parks throughout the City-Parish, as well as extensive, award-winning recreational programs. The majority of BREC's parks are oriented toward active recreation activities, such as sports and athletic fields and playgrounds. BREC has been expanding its inventory of parks to include more focus on the natural environment, such as the very successful Bluebonnet Swamp Nature Center, the Blackwater Nature Preserve, and Frenchtown Road Conservation Area.

With the establishment of 12 community parks through the 2004 Imagine Your Parks (IYP) Strategic Plan, BREC has already raised the standard for parks and recreation facilities in the parish. BREC's park system contains over 6,000 acres across 181 parks. Based on the findings of the BREC Strategic Plan, East Baton Rouge Parish has a well-distributed system of parks and recreation facilities that meets a wide range of needs. There are plenty of opportunities for future park development, including: establishing pedestrian connections between these parks and neighborhoods, enhancing and maintaining existing parks, and working toward setting new standards in quality. BREC and the City-Parish are now challenged to maintain their existing infrastructure of aging parks and to bring its parks and recreation system into a new century of needs, wishes and conditions.

In 2014, BREC developed its 2015 10-year strategic plan – IYP2. With 12 community parks built in the last decade as an outgrowth of its 2004 Imagine Your Parks strategic plan, BREC has transformed the park and recreation experience in the parish. IYP2 is a vision and action plan for parks and recreation in East Baton Rouge Parish that builds upon the successes of BREC's original Imagine Your Parks plan. It takes into account changes in the park system, recent trends in recreation, changes in parish demographics and economy, and input from the community. IYP2 establishes eight strategic directions for BREC to focus on in the next



Scotlandville Parkway

HOW DO RESIDENTS USE THE PARKS?

According to the BREC survey conducted in 2013, City-Parish residents use area parks for a variety of activities. The five highest priorities for Parks and facilities were:

- Neighborhood parks - 27%
- Walking and biking trails - 28%
- Family picnic areas - 21%
- Fitness and exercise facilities - 19%
- Playground areas - 21%



Liberty Lagoon

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Perkins Road Park

PARKS AND RECREATION FACILITIES OWNED BY BREC, THE STATE, AND OTHER AGENCIES:

- 5,699 acres of parks
- 27 acres of public space
- 2,199 undeveloped park acres
- 3,500 developed park acres
- \$1,700 average per acre maintenance budget
- 13.8 acres provided per 1,000 citizens
- 143 playgrounds

decade and lays out an action plan for getting there, including a set of actions BREC can take to move each strategic direction forward as well as detailed action steps that support each action.

The Action Plan is driven by eight Strategic Directions:

1. Continue to place a priority on the wise use of taxpayer dollars.
2. Continue innovation in recreation programming.
3. Continue to raise the standard for parks and recreation facilities, and ensure equitable access to park and recreation experiences across the parish.
4. Strengthen and increase natural resource related recreational opportunities.
5. Enhance connectivity by improving the network of multi-use trails to, within, and between parks and community assets.
6. Increase local awareness of BREC's programs and facilities and the overall value of BREC.
7. Work with partners and the BREC Foundation to achieve common goals and leverage resources.
8. Ensure that BREC's parks and facilities are operated and maintained efficiently and according to best practices and to define standards for park types.

Urban Parks and Plazas

As the City-Parish fosters new development within the core of Baton Rouge, it's important to provide access to quality open space within Downtown. The East Baton Rouge Parish Comprehensive Plan supports Plan Baton Rouge in its effort to set the stage for providing quality pedestrian corridors that link urban parks and give shoppers, workers, and residents an opportunity to rest, converse, and people watch.

The Riverfront Levee path provides an area for Downtown workers and residents to exercise and be close to the river. Additional parks and public spaces are owned and maintained by the State of Louisiana and other City-Parish agencies. The State owns the extensive passive parklands around the State Capitol known as Capitol Park and Arsenal Park. The Old State Capitol grounds on River Road provide another park space. BREC owns and operates Convention Street Park, Expressway Park, and Spanish Town Park.

The City-Parish owns and operates the River Center convention facility and adjacent City Hall, which are connected on the western side by a large public

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plaza built in the 1970s. Repentance Park, located on River Road between the Old State Capitol and the River Center, was redesigned and completed in 2012. Part of that plaza known as Galvez Plaza, along with public space along and in the median of North Boulevard between River Road and Interstate 110, was redeveloped into North Boulevard Town Square. Town Square, managed by the Downtown Development District, provides substantially more public space and makes the spaces highly usable and accessible.

BREC Neighborhood Parks

BREC has over 150 neighborhood parks that provide a place to play, relax, and convene for neighborhood residents. Each neighborhood park varies in the amenities it provides, but common amenities include playgrounds, small sports fields, picnic areas, and places to walk with or without pets. They serve as a gathering place for the neighborhood, where neighbors can chat and kids can play together. Neighborhood parks are usually accessible by foot, bicycle, or public transit within a half-mile radius of residences, providing easy access to green space especially for children and senior adults.

BREC Community Parks

As of 2016, BREC has developed 12 community parks. These parks serve a larger geographic area than neighborhood parks and are designed to engage people in a variety of activities for longer periods of time. Higher levels of maintenance, security, and recreational opportunities are offered by community parks. Recreational opportunities at community parks can include large sportsfields, skateparks, golf courses, dog parks, tennis courts, botanic gardens, trails, large pavilions, theaters, aquatic facilities, and lakes for paddling and fishing.



Repentance Park



College Town Park



North Sherwood Forest Community Park

BREC Recreational Centers

BREC recreation centers are facilities that support park activities and programs, including sports and other recreational activities appropriate to the population or community that uses the park. The facilities serve an important purpose, providing education and recreation to all ages and groups across the Parish. However, the provision of these services is costly, and many of the facilities have undergone substantial wear and tear. The BREC survey found that the physical condition of recreation centers deters certain user groups from participating in programs. Some issues that BREC survey respondents mentioned included a lack of air conditioning, small size of facilities, and lack of “curb appeal.” BREC has updated and renovated Forest Park, Highland Road Park, Anna T. Jordan Park, Jefferson Highway Park, Baker Park, and Antioch Community Park Recreation Centers.

BREC Special Use Facilities

BREC special use facilities include facilities that serve a single, specialized purpose, such as the Baton Rouge Zoo, sports parks, golf courses, Cohn Arboretum, Farr Park Equestrian Center, Magnolia Mound Plantation, Magnolia Cemetery and Knock Knock Children’s Museum.



Knock Knock Children’s Museum

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BREC Trails and Links for Pedestrians and Bicyclists

BREC currently operates and maintains more than 180 parks within the City-Parish, future development will establish pedestrian and bicycle connections between these parks and neighborhoods, while working to enhance and maintain existing trails.

BREC's Capital Area Pathways Project (CAPP) is an initiative to identify routes and build a network of recreational trails and greenways throughout East Baton Rouge Parish. Multi-use pedestrian and cycling connectivity trails will serve as linear parks providing general recreation activities and connecting neighborhoods to parks, amenities, businesses, and attractions. Trails will promote healthy and active lifestyles, spur economic development and neighborhood revitalization, enhance public safety, promote tourism, attract corporate citizens, spark recreation oriented businesses, and improve the environment.

Background

- The inception of the CAPP program can be linked to the "Imagine Your Parks" Strategic Planning Process in 2004 and prior planning processes. Public interest was focused on trails and the desire to use them for exercise or to commute to parks.
- In 2006, BREC held a Trail Route Planning meeting to engage the public and gather input for connectivity trail routes.
- The 2014 "Imagine Your Parks2" Strategic Planning process indicated continued interest in recreational trails as the public's highest requested amenity. \$5 million has been budgeted for CAPP trails in the 10-year Capital Improvement Plan Budget.

Implementation

BREC has developed a Capital Area Pathways Project Master Plan. Developed with public input, the map depicts a system of off-street multi-use trails that will connect the parish, offer a valuable recreational asset, and provide significant alternative transportation value. Influenced by the Greenlinks Plan, and including the majority of its routes, the CAPP Master Plan (approved by the BREC Commission in October 2015) is focused on development within riparian corridors and public rights of way.

BREC's current focus is on executing CAPP Project Initiatives while providing support and advocacy for implementation of community trail efforts. BREC is continuing to develop network connectivity to BREC parks as well as providing in-park trail circuits for walkers and joggers for exercising within an individual neighborhood or community park.

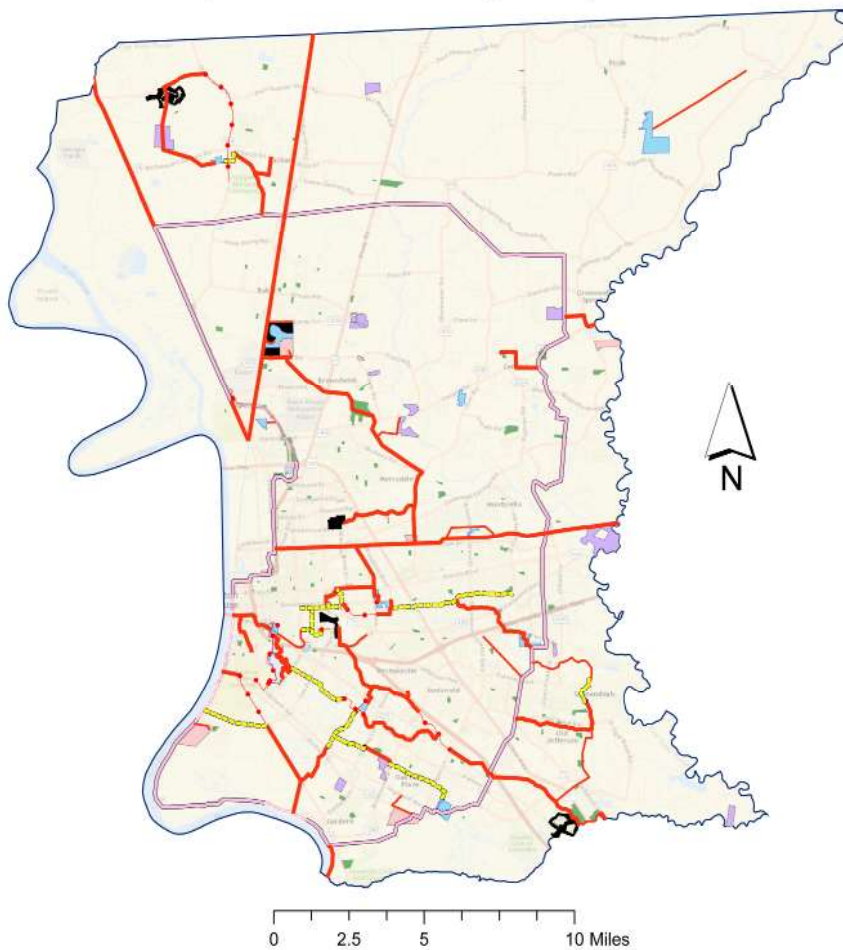
With funding by the City-Parish and expertise from Bike Baton Rouge, BREC, and Capital Region Planning Commission (CRPC), bike lanes and share the road signs have been installed in downtown and the college campus areas.

BREC and the City-Parish with Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development are developing a bicycle and pedestrian master plan to identify appropriate locations for on-street and off-street facilities.

The City-Parish is seeking an active role in providing information and wayfinding for cyclists. For example, the City-Parish has painted pavement markings known as "sharrows" on key roadways throughout

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Capital Area Pathways Project



TRAIL_TYPE

- Existing EBRP Loop
- Existing Multi-Use Priority Trail
- On Street System
- Proposed EBRP Loop
- Proposed Multi-Use Priority Trail
- Proposed Multi-Use Secondary Trail

CLASSIFICATION

- BREC Community Park
- BREC Conservation Park
- BREC Golf Course
- BREC Neighborhood Park
- BREC Special Use Facilities

GOALS OF THE PROPOSED PATHWAYS AND TRAILS

- Complete the CAPP Health Loop multi-use (bike/pedestrian) trail and bridge along Wards and Dawson Creeks surrounding the Health District (small area plan adopted 2015). Of the total approximate 12.25 mile trail, approximately 8.5 miles are complete. Future priority trail efforts will be located in response to community priorities. Current direction indicates desire for an additional crossing of I-12. One mentioned by local cyclists would connect Concord Estates and Citiplace.
- Create a bike and pedestrian connection from North Baton Rouge to South Baton Rouge, City-Brooks Park, and LSU, by connecting paths through the Exxon greenbelt and within the public right-of-way Interstate 110, US 61, and within city-parish drainage right-of-way.
- The connection to Southern University initiated by the Monte Sano Bayou connector could be completed via pathway connection from Swan Avenue, eastward to Hurricane Creek, terminating at Scotlandville Parkway.

Other Non-BREC Trail Initiatives

- Extend the levee trail system to connect Southern University to the north and Farr Equestrian Park south of LSU, effectively becoming an alternative transportation route linking North and South Baton Rouge. This would form a key segment of the proposed Galvez Trail between New Orleans and Port Hudson as set forth in the Louisiana Trails Master Plan.
- Identify readily accessible points along the Amite River and segments along the corridor providing the best terrain for a trail.

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BREC SURVEY RESULTS

BREC routinely commissions statistically valid surveys to identify needs and establish priorities for the future development of the parks system. As a result of these efforts, BREC found that the citizens of East Baton Rouge Parish want to see:

- Improved existing neighborhood parks
- Improved trails that connect parks
- Development of new outdoor pool/aquatic centers
- Improved existing athletic fields
- Land preserved for natural areas

the City-Parish to indicate that bicycle riders use the road for travel. Bike Baton Rouge maintains bicycle riding routes and other information online and organizes regular bicycle rides. The City-Parish Planning Commission also has an interactive mapping application called BikeBR (www.brgov.com/BikeBR) to provide bicycle route information to the public.

Enhancing connections to open spaces for bicycles and pedestrians within existing neighborhoods is a key component of the vision for the future of East Baton Rouge Parish. BREC is continuing to implement the CAPP Master Plan. Phase 1 was completed in 2013 and development of the loop trail continues.

BREC Conservation Land and Protected Areas

Currently, there are few federal or State designated land management areas within East Baton Rouge Parish. While privately owned properties do provide a small percentage of land conservation efforts, the large majority of the City-Parish is subject to future development. BREC currently protects nearly 2,000 acres of habitat within East Baton Rouge parish under several different conservation land designations including Nature Reserve, Satellite Conservation Area, Conservation Management Area and Greenway.

BREC Conservation Areas are protected from further development and encroachment for the sole purpose of preserving wildlife habitat, environmental quality and the loss of species, as outlined by BREC's Natural Resource Management Plan. Each type of park has different restrictions based on shared use and habitat quality. Nature Reserves are restricted from human disturbance outside of scientific study, environmental monitoring and education. Alternatively, Satellite Conservation Areas and Conservation Management Areas are designed to conserve biodiversity and habitat while allowing nature appreciation and education activities in order to increase the public's understanding of the natural world



Bluebonnet Park Nature Center

and foster their conservation ethic. These areas play an important role in the Parish, providing quiet and serene trails for hikers, promoting the ecology and biodiversity of the Parish, and providing specific educational opportunities for East Baton Rouge Parish residents of all ages including programming by BREC Conservation Department staff. Passive, low-impact recreational activities such as bird watching, hiking, wildlife viewing and geocaching will be encouraged in these areas on designated trails. Additionally, greenway's are linear areas established to act as a natural buffer or passage corridor which link BREC parks or trails to one another. These areas play a crucial role as ecological corridors allowing wildlife to migrate and species to interchange and/or their ability to more effectively and safely connect people to parks. Combined, these protected lands will provide outlets to the parish on a variety of levels while conserving and restoring historic habitats throughout the parish and protecting high quality areas from future development. The acquisition of such natural areas should remain a priority for BREC and the City-Parish, increasing the amount of land protected as the parish's population also increases.

BREC's Natural Resource Plan, Imagine Your Parks Plan2, and Capital Area Pathways Project (CAPP) propose new parks, conservation areas, and trails along with goals regarding property management and interpreting existing conservation land. Individual management plans for Nature Reserves, Satellite Conservation Areas and Conservation Management Areas will include scientific surveys of habitat quality and provide restoration suggestions and justification for use restrictions. The Imagine Your Parks2 Plan sets forth a series of action items that BREC is undertaking to strengthen and increase natural resource recreational activities:

1. Implement BREC's Natural Resources Management Plan
2. Develop and implement a land acquisition and easement program focused on creating a connected parish-wide network of natural resources, particularly greenway and blueway corridors.
3. Develop, integrate, and promote nature-based education and recreation programming across ages and skill levels.
4. Promote conservation stewardship volunteerism that provides opportunities for individuals and organizations to leave a positive legacy in the park system.
5. Build on BREC's "Geaux Green" movement to strengthen sustainability policies across the organization.

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Priorities for Parks

Improving and Maintaining Existing Parks

East Baton Rouge Parish residents wish to see their existing parks improve. Of the 155 parks inventoried as part of the BREC Strategic Master Plan, only eight were rated as excellent. There were 115 parks, or 70 percent, rated as fair or poor. These parks will require a major investment in capital to reach an acceptable service level.

The most common perceived issues regarding parks in the City-Parish are the increasing age of park inventory, a lack of uniformity of maintenance operations, insufficient security, and the lack of ADA access to parks and their facilities. East Baton Rouge Parish residents wish to see additional amenities within their parks, including restrooms, additional trails, picnic shelters and picnic tables.

Increasing Access to Parks

East Baton Rouge Parish residents overwhelmingly travel by car to visit parks within the City-Parish. About 89 percent of respondents to the 2014 BREC survey indicated they travel by car to use parks and recreation facilities, compared to 28 percent who sometimes walk, and 16 percent who sometimes bike.

An analysis of the active park network within the City-Parish limits shows that most residents live within walking distance (i.e., straight line distance of 0.5 miles or less) of a public park or facility. However, many parks are located within areas where safe street connections are not frequent enough to be within a reasonable walking distance for most users. CAPP trails are being sited to provide connections from residential areas to parks in the attempt to provide safe walking and biking access. The use of small neighborhood parks that are owned and governed by homeowners' associations are another way to provide access to additional parks within neighborhoods.



University Lake

Part 2: Goals, Objectives and Actions to Achieve the Vision

This section details the parks and recreation goals, objectives and actions that will move East Baton Rouge Parish toward the community's Vision.

Goals are the big over arching ideas, changes or practices that are essential to realize the community's Vision.

Objectives establish specific, measurable, attainable and realistic goals that guide how the Comprehensive Plan is implemented in a way that will achieve the Vision.

Actions outline the steps needed to achieve the objectives.

PARKS AND RECREATION

Part 2: Goals, Objectives and Actions

Parks and Recreation Goals

1. Increase quality of existing parks, access to parks and recreation facilities, and diversity of programs.
2. Improve and expand pedestrian and bicycle paths and trails to promote active recreation and to provide better connections to parks.
3. Expand the City-Parish's nature parks while providing educational and recreational opportunities to Parish residents.

Parks and Recreation Goal 1

Increase the quality of existing parks, access to parks and recreation facilities, and diversity of programs.

Objective 1.1

Improve and maintain existing parks and increase park safety.

Actions to support objective 1.1:

- 1.1.1 Leverage available resources and forge and strengthen strategic ties to operate, maintain, and develop parks, programs, and facilities.
- 1.1.2 Partner with BREC to enhance the quality of existing parks through establishing design criteria and guidelines.
- 1.1.3 Increase safety and security in all City-Parish parks.
- 1.1.4 Employ Crime Prevention through Environmental Design guidelines to the planning and development of recreational facilities and open spaces where appropriate.
- 1.1.5 Evaluate and study existing parks, facilities and programs. Work with BREC to develop and implement performance measures for East Baton Rouge Parish parks, including information about program participants and park users.
- 1.1.6 Maintain park and recreation agency accreditation standards as defined by the Commission for Accreditation of Park and Recreation Agencies.

Objective 1.2

Provide a balanced range of park types, including active and passive recreation, conservation parks, and neighborhood parks as recommended in Imagine Your Parks2.

Actions to support objective 1.2:

- 1.2.1 Collaborate with BREC to implement the “Imagine Your Parks” recommendation to meet a standard of 30 acres of parkland per 1,000 residents.
- 1.2.2 Construct modern recreation facilities that can accommodate a number and variety of amenities.
- 1.2.3 Upgrade some existing recreation centers to provide close-to-home needs or unique program opportunities.
- 1.2.4 Implement and maintain the Riverfront Master Plan as an identity feature for Baton Rouge and support the park corridor plans as detailed in Plan Baton Rouge.
- 1.2.5 Update the “Imagine Your Parks Strategic Plan2” on a ten-year cycle.

Objective 1.3

Ensure that parks and recreational facilities meet the needs of all residents within the City-Parish.

Actions to support objective 1.3:

- 1.3.1 Provide public planning opportunities for new parks projects and review input from concerned citizens regarding the planning and development of recreational and open space facilities.

- 1.3.2 Acquire additional parkland in strategic growth areas and existing neighborhoods that have few park access opportunities.
- 1.3.3 Promote safe, fun, and inclusive environments for recreational and leisure activities by using appropriate accessibility and environmental design guidelines for planning and development of recreational facilities, including but not limited to: ADA, NRPA, EPA, etc.

Parks and Recreation Goal 2

Improve and expand pedestrian and bicycle paths and trails to promote active recreation and to provide better connections to parks.

Objective 2.1

Prioritize implementation of new trails as greenways for access to natural resources.

Actions to support objective 2.1:

- 2.1.1 Continue coordination with LADOTD and BREC to develop and implement a bicycle and pedestrian master plan.
- 2.1.2 Implement the CAPP Master Plan through development planning, taking into consideration the development of regional links and coordination. Review and update the plan as needed.
- 2.1.3 Invest in a network of multi-use bike pedestrian connecting trails that will link connects residential areas and parks. Focus trail development in riparian areas and public rights of way, as well as

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areas identified in the Environment and Conservation element for restoration and re-naturalization such as:

- Create bike and pedestrian path connections along BREC's Health Loop Trail on Wards Creek.
- Increase bike and pedestrian access to parks and the Mississippi River in North Baton Rouge.
- Extend multi-use paths to connect Southern University to the north and Farr Equestrian Park south of LSU.

Objective 2.2

Improve bicycle and pedestrian safety.

Actions to support objective 2.2:

- 2.2.1 Implement crosswalks at all roadway crossings along primary bicycle and pedestrian trails, with traffic signal controlled crossings at major roadways.
- 2.2.2 Implement railroad safety crossings at all rail line crossings along primary bicycle and pedestrian trails, with gated and controlled rail crossings at rail lines with high volumes of train traffic.

Parks and Recreation Goal 3

Expand the City-Parish's nature parks while providing educational and recreational opportunities to Parish residents.

Objective 3.1

Increase recreational and educational opportunities in the City-Parish, centered around

appreciation and understanding of the natural environment.

Actions to support objective 3.1:

- 3.1.1 Continue to support BREC's initiatives set forth in the Imagine Your Parks Plan2 to implement and facilitate programs that reduce the loss of species diversity, as well as to acquire conservation land for protecting native species while providing a variety of recreation opportunities including nature centers, parkways, greenways, and blueways. Additional land should be acquired as the City-Parish population increases.
- 3.1.2 Pursue development of Bayou Duplantier as a blueway and conservation area.
- 3.1.3 Acquire a conservation area that has rich wildlife and plant habitat value along the Comite River in the portion that is classified as Scenic River which ends at the confluence with White's Bayou.
- 3.1.4 Acquire three conservation areas that have wildlife and plant habitat along the Amite River.
- 3.1.5 Establish additional areas of conservation parks in areas adjacent to Cypress Bayou and Hurricane Creek.
- 3.1.6 Acquire conservation land identified in the Natural Resource Management Plan.

Objective 3.2

Implement passive recreation programs in nature parks focused on environmental education.

Actions to support objective 3.2:

- 3.2.1 Collaborate with the East Baton Rouge

Parish School Board and private schools to: develop science and ecological education programs, bring students to ecological parks, and conduct classes there.

- 3.2.2 Partner with other agencies and nonprofit organizations, including the LSU AgCenter, Sierra Club, Louisiana Urban Forestry Council, Baton Rouge Green, Hilltop Arboretum, Baton Rouge Audubon Society, Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries, and Louisiana Geological Survey to enhance education in the Parish.